CHAPTER V

THE IDEAL WOMAN IN ENGLISH POETRY

As I gave already in this class a lecture on the subject of love poetry, you will easily understand that the subject of the present lecture is not exactly love. It is rather about love's imagining of perfect character and perfect beauty. The part of it to which I think your attention could be deservedly given is that relating to the imagined wife of the future, for this is a subject little treated of in Eastern poetry. It is a very pretty subject. But in Japan and other countries of the East almost every young man knows beforehand whom he is likely to marry. Marriage is arranged by the family: it is a family matter, indeed a family duty and not a romantic pursuit. At one time, very long ago, in Europe, marriages were arranged in much the same way. But nowadays it may be said in general that no young man in England or America can even imagine whom he will marry. He has to find his wife for himself; and he has nobody to help him; and if he makes a mistake, so much the worse for him. So to Western imagination the wife of the future is a mystery, a romance, an anxiety—something to dream about and to write poetry about.

This little book that I hold in my hand is now very rare. It is out of print, but it is worth mentioning to you because it is the composition of an exquisite man of letters, Frederick Locker-Lampson, best of all nineteenth century writers of society verse. It is called "Patchwork." Many years ago the author kept a kind of journal in which he wrote down or copied all the most beautiful or most curious things which he had heard or which he had found in books.

Only the best things remained, so the value of the book is his taste in selection. Whatever Locker-Lampson pronounced good, the world now knows to have been exactly what he pronounced, for his taste was very fine. And in this book I find a little poem quoted from Mr. Edwin Arnold, now Sir Edwin. Sir Edwin Arnold is now old and blind, and he has not been thought of kindly enough in Japan, because his work has not been sufficiently known. Some people have even said his writings did harm to Japan, but I want to assure you that such statements are stupid lies. On the contrary he did for Japan whatever good the best of his talent as a poet and the best of his influence as a great journalist could enable him to do. But to come back to our subject: when Sir Edwin was a young student he had his dreams about marriage like other young English students, and he put one of them into verse, and that verse was at once picked out by Frederick Locker-Lampson for his little book of gems. Half a century has passed since then; but Locker-Lampson's judgment remains good, and I am going to put this little poem first because it so well illustrates the subject of the lecture. It is entitled "A Ma Future."

Where waitest thou,
Lady, I am to love? Thou comest not,
Thou knowest of my sad and lonely lot—
I looked for thee ere now!

It is the May,
And each sweet sister soul hath found its brother,
Only we two seek fondly each the other,
And seeking still delay.

Where art thou, sweet?
I long for thee as thirsty lips for streams,
O gentle promised angel of my dreams,
Why do we never meet?

Thou art as I,
Thy soul doth wait for mine as mine for thee;
We cannot live apart, must meeting be
Never before we die?

Dear soul, not so,
For time doth keep for us some happy years,
And God hath portion'd us our smiles and tears,
Thou knowest, and I know.

Therefore I bear
This winter-tide as bravely as I may,
Patiently waiting for the bright spring day
That cometh with thee, dear.

'Tis the May light
That crimsons all the quiet college gloom,
May it shine softly in thy sleeping room,
And so, dear wife, good night.

This is, of course, addressed to the spirit of the unknown future wife. It is pretty, though it is only the work of a young student. But some two hundred years before, another student—a very great student, Richard Crashaw,—had a fancy of the same kind, and made verses about it which are famous. You will find parts of his poem about the imaginary wife in the ordinary anthologies, but not all of it, for it is very long. I will quote those verses which seem to me the best.

WISHES

Whoe'er she be—
That not impossible She
That shall command my heart and me:

Where'er she lie,
Lock'd up from mortal eye
In shady leaves of destiny:

Till that ripe birth
Of studied Fate stand forth,
And teach her fair steps to our earth:

Till that divine
Idea take a shrine
Of crystal flesh, through which to shine:

Meet you her, my Wishes,
Bespeak her to my blisses,
And be ye call'd my absent kisses.

The poet is supposing that the girl whom he is to marry may not as yet even have been born, for though men in the world of scholarship can marry only late in life, the wife is generally quite young. Marriage is far away in the future for the student, therefore these fancies. What he means to say in short is about like this:

"Oh, my wishes, go out of my heart and look for the being whom I am destined to marry — find the soul of her, whether born or yet unborn, and tell that soul of the love that is waiting for it." Then he tries to describe the imagined woman he hopes to find:

I wish her Beauty,
That owes not all its duty
To gaudy tire, or glist'ring shoe-tie:

Something more than
Taffata or tissue can,
Or rampant feather, or rich fan.

More than the spoil
Of shop or silkworm's toil,
Or a bought blush, or a set smile.

A Face, that's best
By its own beauty drest,
And can alone commend the rest.

A Face, made up
Out of no other shop
Than what Nature's white hand sets ope.

A Cheek, where grows
More than a morning rose,

Which to no box his being owes.

. . . . .

Eyes, that displace
The neighbour diamond, and outface
That sunshine by their own sweet grace.

Tresses, that wear
Jewels but to declare
How much themselves more precious are.

. . . . .

Smiles, that can warm
The blood, yet teach a charm,
That chastity shall take no harm.

. . . . .

Life, that dares send
A challenge to his end,
And when it comes, say, "Welcome, friend!"

There is much more, but the best of the thoughts are here. They are not exactly new thoughts, nor strange thoughts, but they are finely expressed in a strong and simple way.

There is another composition on the same subject—the imaginary spouse, the destined one. But this is written by a woman, Christina Rossetti.

SOMEWHERE OR OTHER

Somewhere or other there must surely be
  The face not seen, the voice not heard,
The heart that not yet—never yet—ah me!
  Made answer to my word.

Somewhere or other, may be near or far;
  Past land and sea, clean out of sight;
Beyond the wandering moon, beyond the star
  That tracks her night by night.

Somewhere or other, may be far or near;
  With just a wall, a hedge, between;

With just the last leaves of the dying year
Fallen on a turf grown green.

And that turf means of course the turf of a grave in the churchyard. This poem expresses fear that the destined one never can be met, because death may come before the meeting time. All through the poem there is the suggestion of an old belief that for every man and for every woman there must be a mate, yet that it is a chance whether the mate will ever be found.

You observe that all of these are ghostly poems, whether prospective or retrospective. Here is another prospective poem:

AMATURUS

Somewhere beneath the sun,
These quivering heart-strings prove it,
Somewhere there must be one
Made for this soul, to move it;
Some one that hides her sweetness
From neighbours whom she slights,
Nor can attain completeness,
Nor give her heart its rights;
Some one whom I could court
With no great change of manner,
Still holding reason's fort,
Though waving fancy's banner;
A lady, not so queenly
As to disdain my hand,
Yet born to smile serenely
Like those that rule the land;
Noble, but not too proud;
With soft hair simply folded,
And bright face crescent-browed
And throat by Muses moulded,

. . . . .

Keen lips, that shape soft sayings
Like crystals of the snow,
With pretty half-betrayings

Of things one may not know;
Fair hand, whose touches thrill,
Like golden rod of wonder,
Which Hermes wields at will
Spirit and flesh to sunder.

. . . .

Forth, Love, and find this maid,
Wherever she be hidden:
Speak, Love, be not afraid,
But plead as thou art bidden;
And say, that he who taught thee
His yearning want and pain,
Too dearly, dearly bought thee
To part with thee in vain.

These lines are by the author of that exquisite little book "Ionica"—a book about which I hope to talk to you in another lecture. His real name was William Cory, and he was long the headmaster of an English public school, during which time he composed and published anonymously the charming verses which have made him famous—modelling his best work in close imitation of the Greek poets. A few expressions in these lines need explanation. For instance, the allusion to Hermes and his rod. I think you know that Hermes is the Greek name of the same god whom the Romans called Mercury, — commonly represented as a beautiful young man, naked and running quickly, having wings attached to the sandals upon his feet. Runners used to pray to him for skill in winning foot races. But this god had many forms and many attributes, and one of his supposed duties was to bring the souls of the dead into the presence of the king of Hades. So you will see some pictures of him standing before the throne of the king of the Dead, and behind him a long procession of shuddering ghosts. He is nearly always pictured as holding in his hands a strange sceptre called the *caduceus*, a short staff about which two little serpents are coiled, and at the top of which is a tiny pair of wings. This is the golden rod re-

ferred to by the poet; when Hermes touched anybody with it, the soul of the person touched was obliged immediately to leave the body and follow after him. So it is a very beautiful stroke of art in this poem to represent the touch of the hand of great love as having the magical power of the golden rod of Hermes. It is as if the poet were to say: "Should she but touch me, I know that my spirit would leap out of my body and follow after her." Then there is the expression "crescent-browed." It means only having beautifully curved eyebrows—arched eyebrows being considered particularly beautiful in Western countries.

Now we will consider another poem of the ideal. What we have been reading referred to ghostly ideals, to memories, or to hopes. Let us now see how the poets have talked about realities. Here is a pretty thing by Thomas Ashe. It is entitled "Pansie;" and this flower name is really a corruption of a French word "pensée," meaning a thought. The flower is very beautiful, and its name is sometimes given to girls, as in the present case.

MEET WE NO ANGELS, PANSIE?

Came, on a Sabbath noon, my sweet,
In white, to find her lover;
The grass grew proud beneath her feet,
The green elm-leaves above her:—
Meet we no angels, Pansie?

She said, "We meet no angels now;"
And soft lights stream'd upon her:
And with white hand she touch'd a bough;
She did it that great honour:—
What! meet no angels, Pansie?

O sweet brown hat, brown hair, brown eyes,
Down-dropp'd brown eyes, so tender!
Then what said I? Gallant replies
Seem flattery, and offend her:—
But meet no angels, Pansie?

The suggestion is obvious, that the maiden realizes to the lover's eye the ideal of an angel. As she comes he asks her slyly,—for she has been to the church—"Is it true that nobody ever sees real angels?" She answers innocently, thinking him to be in earnest, "No—long ago people used to see angels, but in these times no one ever sees them." He does not dare tell her how beautiful she seems to him; but he suggests much more than admiration by the tone of his protesting response to her answer: "What! You cannot mean to say that there are no angels now?" Of course that is the same as to say, "I see an angel now"—but the girl is much too innocent to take the real and flattering meaning.

Wordsworth's portrait of the ideal woman is very famous; it was written about his own wife, though that fact would not be guessed from the poem. The last stanza is the most famous, but we had better quote them all.

She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleam'd upon my sight;
A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament;
Her eyes as stars of twilight fair;
Like twilight's, too, her dusky hair;
But all things else about her drawn
From May-time and the cheerful dawn;
A dancing shape, an image gay,
To haunt, to startle, and waylay.

I saw her upon nearer view,
A Spirit, yet a Woman too!
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet;
A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

And now I see with eye serene
The very pulse of the machine;
A being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller betwixt life and death;
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;
A perfect Woman, nobly plann'd,
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light.

I quoted this after the "Pansie" poem to show you how much more deeply Wordsworth could touch the same subject. To him, too, the first apparition of the ideal maiden seemed angelic; like Ashe he could perceive the mingled attraction of innocence and of youth. But innocence and youth are by no means all that make up the best attributes of woman; character is more than innocence and more than youth, and it is character that Wordsworth studies. But in the last verse he tells us that the angel is always there, nevertheless, even when the good woman becomes old. The angel is the Mother-soul.

Wordsworth's idea that character is the supreme charm was expressed very long before him by other English poets, notably by Thomas Carew.

He that loves a rosy cheek,
  Or a coral lip admires,
Or from star-like eyes doth seek
  Fuel to maintain his fires:
As old Time makes these decay,
So his flames must waste away.

But a smooth and steadfast mind,
  Gentle thoughts and calm desires,
Hearts with equal love combined,
  Kindle never-dying fires.
Where these are not, I despise
Lovely cheeks or lips or eyes.

For about three hundred years in English literature it was the fashion—a fashion borrowed from the Latin poets—to speak of love as a fire or flame, and you must understand the image in these verses in that signification. To-day the fashion is not quite dead, but very few poets now follow it.

Byron himself, with all his passion and his affected scorn of ethical convention, could and did, when he pleased, draw beautiful portraits of moral as well as physical attraction. These stanzas are famous; they paint for us a person with equal attraction of body and mind.

She walks in beauty, like the night
  Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
  Meet in her aspect and her eyes;
Thus mellow'd to that tender light
  Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
  Had half impair'd the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
  Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
  How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
  So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
  But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
  A heart whose love is innocent!

It is worth noticing that in each of the last three poems, the physical beauty described is that of dark eyes and hair. This may serve to remind you that there are two distinct types, opposite types, of beauty celebrated by English poets; and the next poem which I am going to quote, the beautiful "Ruth" of Thomas Hood, also describes a dark woman.

She stood breast-high amid the corn,
Clasp'd by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won.

On her cheek an autumn flush,
Deeply ripen'd;—such a blush
In the midst of brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.

Round her eyes her tresses fell,
Which were blackest none could tell,
But long lashes veil'd a light,
That had else been all too bright.

And her hat, with shady brim,
Made her tressy forehead dim;—
Thus she stood amid the stooks,
Praising God with sweetest looks:—

Sure, I said, Heav'n did not mean,
Where I reap thou shouldst but glean,
Lay thy sheaf adown and come,
Share my harvest and my home.

We might call this the ideal of a peasant girl whose poverty appeals to the sympathy of all who behold her. The name of the poem is suggested indeed by the Bible story of Ruth the gleaner, but the story in the poem is only that of a rich farmer who marries a very poor girl, because of her beauty and her goodness. It is just a charming picture—a picture of the dark beauty which is so much admired in Northern countries, where it is less common than in Southern Europe. There are beautiful brown-skinned types; and the flush of youth on the cheeks of such a brown girl has been compared to the red upon a ripe peach or a russet apple—a hard kind of apple, very sweet and juicy, which is brown instead of yellow, or reddish brown. But the poet makes the comparison with poppy flowers and wheat. That, of course, means golden yellow and red; in

English wheat fields red poppy flowers grow in abundance. The expression "tressy forehead" in the second line of the fourth stanza means a forehead half covered with falling, loose hair.

The foregoing pretty picture may be offset by a charming poem of Browning's describing a lover's pride in his illusion. It is simply entitled "Song," and to appreciate it you must try to understand the mood of a young man who believes that he has actually realized his ideal, and that the woman that he loves is the most beautiful person in the whole world. The fact that this is simply imagination on his part does not make the poem less beautiful—on the contrary, the false imagining is just what makes it beautiful, the youthful emotion of a moment being so humanly and frankly described. Such a youth must imagine that every one else sees and thinks about the girl just as he does, and he expects them to confess it.

Nay but you, who do not love her,
  Is she not pure gold, my mistress?
Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her?
  Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall?

Because, you spend your lives in praising;
  To praise, you search the wide world over;
Then why not witness, calmly gazing,
  If earth holds aught—speak truth—above her?
Above this tress, and this, I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much!

You see the picture, I think,—probably some artist's studio for a background. She sits or stands there with her long hair loosely flowing down to her feet like a river of gold; and her lover, lifting up some of the long tresses in his hand, asks his friend, who stands by, to notice how beautiful such hair is. Perhaps the girl was having her picture painted. One would think so from the question, "Since

your business is to look for beautiful things, why can you not honestly acknowledge that this woman is the most beautiful thing in the whole world?" Or we might imagine the questioned person to be a critic by profession as well as an artist. Like the preceding poem this also is a picture. But the next poem, also by Browning, is much more than a picture—it is very profound indeed, simple as it looks. An old man is sitting by the dead body of a young girl of about sixteen. He tells us how he secretly loved her, as a father might love a daughter, as a brother might love a sister. But he would have wished, if he had not been so old, and she so young, to love her as a husband. He never could have her in this world, but why should he not hope for it in the future world? He whispers into her dead ear his wish, and he puts a flower into her dead hand, thinking, "When she wakes up, in another life, she will see that flower, and remember what I said to her, and how much I loved her." That is the mere story. But we must understand that the greatness of the love expressed in the poem is awakened by an ideal of innocence and sweetness and goodness, and the affection is of the soul—that is to say, it is the love of beautiful character, not the love of a beautiful face only, that is expressed.

EVELYN HOPE

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
  Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
  She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die too, in the glass;
  Little has yet been changed, I think:
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
  Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

Sixteen years old when she died!
  Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name;
It was not her time to love; beside,
  Her life had many a hope and aim,

Duties enough and little cares,
  And now was quiet, now astir,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,—
  And the sweet white brow is all of her.

Is it too late, then, Evelyn Hope?
  What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
  Made you of spirit, fire and dew—
And, just because I was thrice as old
  And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was nought to each, must I be told?
  We were fellow mortals, nought beside?

No, indeed! for God above
  Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love:
  I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
  Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn, much to forget
  Ere the time be come for taking you.

But the time will come,—at last it will,
  When, Evelyn Hope, what meant, I shall say,
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
  That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
  And your mouth of your own geranium's red—
And what you would do with me, in fine,
  In the new life come in the old one's stead.

I have lived, I shall say, so much since then,
  Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
  Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
  Either I missed or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
  What is the issue? let us see!

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while!

My heart seemed full as it could hold—
There was space and to spare for the frank young smile
And the red young mouth and the hair's young gold.
So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep—
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand.
There, that is our secret! go to sleep;
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

No other poet has written so many different kinds of poems on this subject as Browning; and although I cannot quote all of them, I must not neglect to make a just representation of the variety. Here is another example: the chief idea is again the beauty of truthfulness and fidelity, but the artistic impression is quite different.

A simple ring with a single stone,
To the vulgar eye no stone of price:
Whisper the right word, that alone—
Forth starts a sprite, like fire from ice.
And lo, you are lord (says an Eastern scroll)
Of heaven and earth, lord whole and sole
Through the power in a pearl.

A woman ('tis I this time that say)
With little the world counts worthy praise:
Utter the true word out and away
Escapes her soul; I am wrapt in blaze,
Creation's lord, of heaven and earth
Lord whole and sole—by a minute's birth—
Through the love in a girl!

Paraphrased, the meaning will not prove as simple as the verses:—Here is a finger ring set with one small stone, one jewel. It is a very cheap-looking stone to common eyes. But if you know a certain magical word, and, after putting the ring on your finger, you whisper that magical word over the cheap-looking stone, suddenly a spirit, a demon or a genie, springs from that gem like a flash of fire miraculously issuing from a lump of ice. And that spirit or genie has power to make you king of the whole world and of the

sky above the world, lord of the spirits of heaven and earth and air and fire. Yet the stone is only a pearl—and it can make you lord of the universe. That is the old Arabian story. The word "scroll" here means a manuscript, an Arabian manuscript.

But what is after all the happiness of mere power? There is a greater happiness possible than to be lord of heaven and earth; that is the happiness of being truly loved. Here is a woman; to the eye of the world, to the sight of other men, she is not very beautiful nor at all remarkable in any way. She is just an ordinary woman, as the pearl in the ring is to all appearances just a common pearl. But let the right word be said, let the soul of that woman be once really touched by the magic of love, and what a revelation! As the spirit in the Arabian story sprang from the stone of the magical ring, when the word was spoken, so from the heart of this woman suddenly her soul displays itself in shining light. And the man who loves, instantly becomes, in the splendour of that light, verily the lord of heaven and earth; to the eyes of the being who loves him he is a god.

The legend is the legend of Solomon—not the Solomon of the Bible, but the much more wonderful Solomon of the Arabian story-teller. His power is said to have been in a certain seal ring, upon which the mystical name of Allah, or at least one of the ninety and nine mystical names, was engraved. When he chose to use this ring, all the spirits of air, the spirits of earth, the spirits of water and the spirits of fire were obliged to obey him. The name of such a ring is usually "Talisman."

Here is another of Browning's jewels, one of the last poems written shortly before his death. It is entitled "Summum Bonum,"—signifying "the highest good." The subject is a kiss; we may understand that the first betrothal kiss is the mark of affection described. When the promise of marriage has been made, that promise is sealed or confirmed by the first kiss. But this refers only to the refined classes of society. Among the English people proper, especially the

country folk, kissing a girl is only a form of showing mere good will, and has no serious meaning at all.

All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
  All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:
  Breath and bloom, shade and shine,—wonder, wealth, and—how far above them—
    Truth, that's brighter than gem,
    Trust, that's purer than pearl,—
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe—all were for me
    In the kiss of one girl.

There is in this a suggestion of Ben Jonson, who uses almost exactly the same simile without any moral significance. The advantage of Browning is that he has used the sensuous imagery for ethical symbolism; here he greatly surpasses Jonson, though it would be hard to improve upon the beauty of Jonson's verses, as merely describing visual beauty. Here are Jonson's stanzas:

THE TRIUMPH

See the Chariot at hand here of Love,
  Wherein my Lady rideth!
Each that draws is a swan or a dove,
  And well the car Love guideth.
As she goes, all hearts do duty
    Unto her beauty;
And enamour'd do wish, so they might
    But enjoy such a sight,
That they still were to run by her side,
Through swords, through seas, whither she would ride.

Do but look on her eyes, they do light
  All that Love's world compriseth!
Do but look on her hair, it is bright
  As Love's star when it riseth!
Do but mark, her forehead's smoother
    Than words that soothe her;
And from her arch'd brows such a grace

Sheds itself through the face,
As alone there triumphs to the life
All the gain, all the good, of the elements' strife.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow
Before rude hands have touch'd it?
Have you mark'd but the fall of the snow
Before the soil hath smutch'd it?
Have you felt the wool of beaver,
Or swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier,
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
O so white, O so soft, O so sweet is she!

The first of the above stanzas is a study after the Roman poets; but the last stanza is Jonson's own and is very famous. You will see that Browning was probably inspired by him, but I think that his verses are much more beautiful in thought and feeling.

There is one type of ideal woman very seldom described in poetry—the old maid, the woman whom sorrow or misfortune prevents from fulfilling her natural destiny. Commonly the woman who never marries is said to become cross, bad tempered, unpleasant in character. She could not be blamed for this, I think; but there are old maids who always remain as unselfish and frank and kind as a girl, and who keep the charm of girlhood even when their hair is white. Hartley Coleridge, son of the great Samuel, attempted to describe such a one, and his picture is both touching and beautiful.

THE SOLITARY-HEARTED

She was a queen of noble Nature's crowning,
A smile of hers was like an act of grace;
She had no winsome looks, no pretty frowning,
Like daily beauties of the vulgar race:
But if she smiled, a light was on her face,
A clear, cool kindliness, a lunar beam

Of peaceful radiance, silvering o'er the stream
Of human thought with unabiding glory;
Not quite a waking truth, not quite a dream,
A visitation, bright and transitory.

But she is changed,—hath felt the touch of sorrow,
No love hath she, no understanding friend;
O grief! when Heaven is forced of earth to borrow
What the poor niggard earth has not to lend;
But when the stalk is snapt, the rose must bend.
The tallest flower that skyward rears its head
Grows from the common ground, and there must shed
Its delicate petals. Cruel fate, too surely,
That they should find so base a bridal bed,
Who lived in virgin pride, so sweet and purely.

She had a brother, and a tender father,
And she was loved, but not as others are
From whom we ask return of love, – but rather
As one might love a dream; a phantom fair
Of something exquisitely strange and rare,
Which all were glad to look on, men and maids,
Yet no one claim'd—as oft, in dewy glades,
The peering primrose, like a sudden gladness,
Gleams on the soul, yet unregarded fades;—
The joy is ours, but all its own the sadness.

'Tis vain to say—her worst of grief is only
The common lot, which all the world have known;
To her 'tis more, because her heart is lonely,
And yet she hath no strength to stand alone,—
Once she had playmates, fancies of her own,
And she did love them. They are past away
As Fairies vanish at the break of day;
And like a spectre of an age departed,
Or unsphered Angel wofully astray,
She glides along—the solitary-hearted.

Perhaps it is scarcely possible for you to imagine that a woman finds it impossible to marry because of being too beautiful, too wise, and too good. In Western countries it

is not impossible at all. You must try to imagine entirely different social conditions—conditions in which marriage depends much more upon the person than upon the parents, much more upon inclination than upon anything else. A woman's chances of marriage depend very much upon herself, upon her power of pleasing and charming. Thousands and tens of thousands can never get married. Now there are cases in which a woman can please too much. Men become afraid of her. They think, "She knows too much, I dare not be frank with her"—or, "She is too beautiful, she never would accept a common person like me"—or, "She is too formal and correct, she would never forgive a mistake, and I could never be happy with her." Not only is this possible, but it frequently happens. Too much excellence makes a misfortune. I think you can understand it best by the reference to the very natural prejudice against over-educated women, a prejudice founded upon experience and existing in all countries, even in Japan. Men are not attracted to a woman because she is excellent at mathematics, because she knows eight or nine different languages, because she has acquired all the conventions of high-pressure training. Men do not care about that. They want love and trust and kindliness and ability to make a home beautiful and happy. Well, the poem we have been reading is very pathetic because it describes a woman who cannot fulfil her natural destiny, cannot be loved—this through no fault of her own, but quite the reverse. To be too much advanced beyond one's time and environment is even a worse misfortune than to be too much behind.